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Marriage at the intersection between tradition and globalization Turkish marriage migration between Emirdag and Belgium from 1989 to present

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Abstract

In this paper, we will investigate the popularity of marriage migration between Turkish communities in Western Europe and emigration regions in Turkey. Our focus here is specifically on the Belgian case, namely the 'Emirdag connection'. In Belgium, the majority of immigrants with a Turkish background come from the region of Emirdag, in the province of Afyon. On the basis of quantitative research methodologies, we first consider the magnitude of the phenomenon and the socio-economic situation of those involved. Using the qualitative research techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviews, we analyze the mechanisms in an attempt to explain marriage migration between these regions. Why do so many young people, born and raised in Western Europe, opt for an unknown partner from a region that is largely unknown to them but which proves to be their parents', or even grandparents', region of origin? Why does migration remain such a valuable life project for many young people in these regions of origin, despite the real danger of many negative side effects? The popularity of marriage migration is often explained by its role in making migration possible. However, migration theories alone cannot explain this phenomenon. Here we will argue that the existence of a 'culture of migration' that binds the region of origin with the region of destination and in which 'the family' as an institution is capable of building a bridge between traditional praxis, as well as the challenges linked to international migration, are crucial for understanding the enduring popularity of marriage migration.

Keywords: 'Culture of migration'; Marriage migration; Turkey; Family

1. Introduction

Migration marriages remain an intriguing phenomenon in Western Europe. After the (labour) immigration stop in 1974, family migration became the most popular way of settling in Western Europe. Also in Belgium, the majority of immigrants enter the country on the basis of family migration, more specifically, on the basis of marriage migration. Why do so many young people, born and raised in Western Europe, opt for an unknown partner coming from a region that is largely unknown to them but which proves to be their parents' or even grandparents' region of origin? Why does migration remain such a valuable life project for many young people in these regions of origin, despite the real danger of many negative side effects? The popularity of marriage migration is often explained by its instrumental role in making migration possible. However, migration theories alone cannot explain this phenomenon. In this paper, we will argue that the existence of a 'culture of

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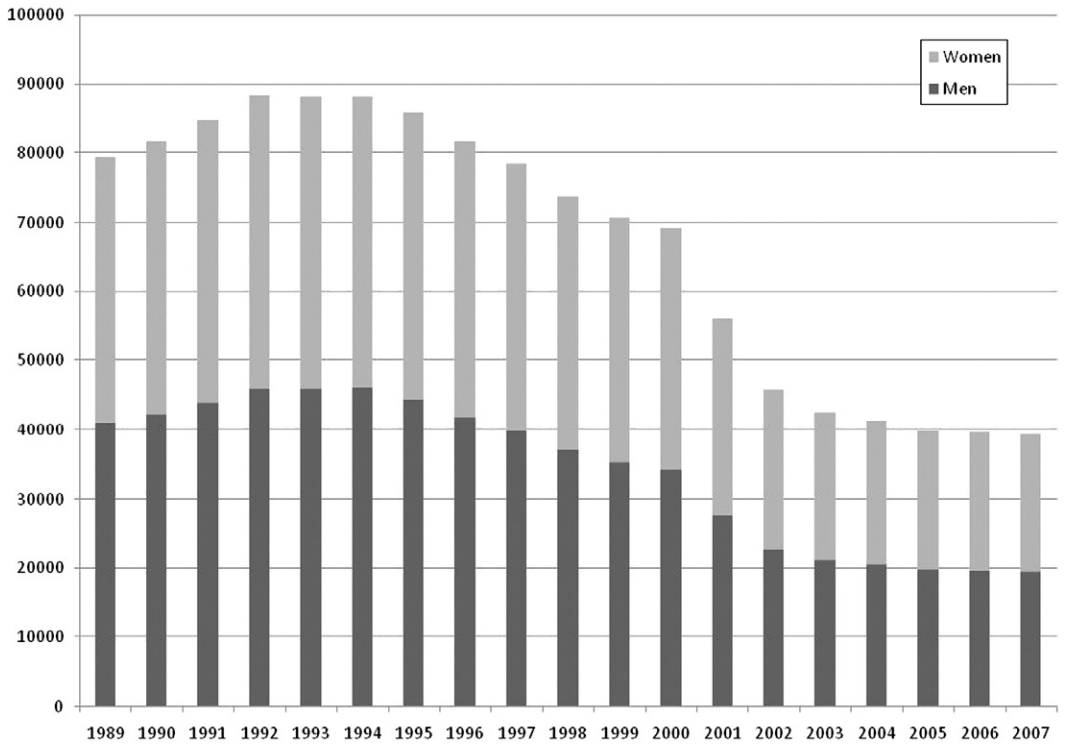

Fig. 1. Number of Turkish citizens (men and women) living in Belgium (1989–2007). Source: National Statistics: http://ecodata.mineco.fgov.be/.

migration' that binds the region of origin with the region of destination and in which 'the family' as an institution is capable of building a bridge between traditional praxis, as well as the challenges linked to international migration, are crucial for understanding the enduring popularity of marriage migration.

Our focus here is specifically on the Belgian case, namely the 'Emirdag connection'. In Belgium, the majority of immigrants with a Turkish background come from the region of Emirdag, in the province of Afyon. Over the last 40 years, a close relationship has been established between this emigration region and several Turkish communities in Flanders and Brussels.

2. Turkish migration towards Belgium

Labour migration from Turkey to Belgium started with a bilateral agreement between Turkey and Belgium in 1962. Although a moratorium on labour immigration was called in 1974, the Turkish population in Belgium has continued to grow steadily. There is still an annual inflow of around 3000 Turkish citizens a year. In 2007, for example, 2965 Turks entered the country.

In Belgium, Moroccans and Turks make up the largest communities of residents from outside the European Union. In 1998, there were 79,460 Turks (7.9% of the total foreign population) living in Belgium. In 2000, the number of Turkish nationals dropped to 56,172, when in the same year, 17,282 Turks acquired Belgian nationality. In 2003, there were 41,336 Turkish nationals. Since 2007, the number has dropped below 40,000 (39,419 in 2007) (Fig. 1). By 2005, the majority of people of Turkish origin had acquired Belgian nationality.[1] It is estimated that the number of people of Turkish descent in Belgium today by far exceeds 100,000.

The total number of non-EU citizens seems to drop, but not the number of foreign born residents, reaching almost 13% of the Belgian population. Of the 264,217 persons who acquired Belgian citizenship between 1999 and 2004, 34% were Moroccan, 20% were Turkish and 6% were Italian. In 2007, Turks made up 8% of all naturalizations, while Moroccans constituted 24%. The Turkish community is the second largest community with regard to naturalization after Moroccan citizens, who submit almost twice as many applications as the Turks.

Despite the ban on labour migration in place since 1974, there are still legal openings for entering the country on a temporary or permanent basis. Leaving tourism aside, five main patterns of legal migration

[1] Belgian National Institute of Statistics.

characterize the post-1974 era. The majority of newcomers after 1974 came to Belgium on the basis of *family reunification* or *family formation*. *Family reunion* refers to the right of legally residing foreigners to bring in their spouse, and children under the age of 18. Other members of their family can also be allowed if certain conditions are fulfilled. We speak about *family formation* when a person enters the country with the purpose of marrying a person settled in Belgium. In this case, the marriage takes place in Belgium. Both ways of entering Belgium are also called *chain migration*.

Chain migration is one of the legal ways of entering the country and of obtaining a long-term residence permit. If chain migration concerns the reunion of (future) spouses, we refer to it as *marriage migration.* Contrary to expectations, the tendency within Turkish communities in Belgium to marry someone who grew up in the country of origin has remained (Lesthaeghe, 1997). However, the pattern of Turkish chain migration towards Flanders has gradually changed and nowadays it is equally male–female. Population data show that from January 1, 2001 until April 15, 2005, 46% of the Turkish newcomers who entered Belgium on the basis of marriage were women (Deschamps, 2005). Initially, chain migration applied exclusively to women and children who joined their husbands/fathers who were already in Belgium as *gastarbeiter* (guest workers). Before 1974 economic migration was male, chain migration was female. In general, men chose to immigrate, while women and children merely followed their husbands or fathers. This pattern slowly changed as the second generation grew up in Western Europe and started to marry.

Over the last decade, chain migration became the most popular way of entering Belgium; in other words, the majority of newcomers arrived in Belgium as (future) spouses of Belgian residents. This certainly applies to Turkish migration. Particular to the Turkish residents in Belgium, including the second generation, is that the majority still marry a person who grew up in Turkey.

Table 1
Percentage of men of Turkish origin from the second and 'in-between' generation and who married a female marriage migrant from Turkey (N=7406).

	Migration generation of the husband		Total
	In-between generation	Second generation	
Both partners raised in Belgium	26.6	39.4	35.3
Wife is a marriage migrant	73.3	60.6	64.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Yalçin, Lodewyckx, Mareynissen, and Van Caudenberg (2006).

Table 2
Percentage of women of Turkish origin from the second and 'in-between' generation and who married a male marriage migrant from Turkey (N=7406).

	Migration generation of the wife		Total
	In-between generation	Second generation	
Both partners raised in Belgium	20.3	39.9	33.3
Husband is a marriage migrant	79.7	60.1	66.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Yalçin et al. (2006).

3. Turkish marriage migration in Belgium/Flanders in numbers

To get an idea of the huge scale of Turkish marriage migration and the socio-economic status of those involved, we can rely on three data sets: the first is from the National Register of Belgium, the second from the Emirdag marriage register, and the third from the Crossroad Bank of Social Security.

Contrary to expectations, the tendency within Turkish (and also Moroccan) communities in Belgium to marry someone who grew up in the country of origin has remained. For this, we rely on data from the National Register of Belgium. The data set consists of all married couples or couples living together in Flanders on January 1, 2004, and in which one of the partners has held Turkish nationality at some point. The data set contains19,251 couples.

Table 1 shows the marriage pattern of Turkish men raised in Belgium. Here we note that nearly three quarters of men from the 'in-between'[2] generation and 60% of men from the second generation[3] marry a partner from Turkey.

As we can see in Table 2, the percentage of women marrying a partner from Turkey is even higher: nearly 80% of the women who arrived between the age of 7 and 18 years in Belgium, the so-called 'in-between' generation (in-between the first and second generation[4]) versus 60% of the second generation.

[2] People who arrived between the age of 7 and 18 years in Belgium as children of first generation labour migrants.

[3] People who were born in Belgium to first generation labour migrants or who arrived before the age of 7 years old as children of first generation labour migrants.

[4] A generation of people who followed schooling in Belgium at a later age than the people of the second generation.

Within the Turkish community in Flanders, 60% of both men and women of the second generation are married to a partner who lived in Turkey until marriage. In other words, six in ten young people with a Turkish background who are raised in Flanders opt for a partner who lives in the country where their parents or grandparents came from.

A study by Reniers (1997) shows that Turkish migrants mainly originate from a cluster of central Anatolian provinces. According to data on migrants from the State Institute of Statistics in Ankara, the three provinces that provided the most Turkish immigrants are Afyon, Eskisehir and Kayseri. Almost one-third of Turkish immigrants in Belgium originate from Afyon, in particular Emirdag (Reniers, 1997). This district consists of about 70 villages, of which the town Emirdag (around 20,000 inhabitants) is the administrative centre. This town is situated in a poor, arid area that is greatly affected by emigration.

The region of Emirdag – being the most important Turkish emigration region for Belgium – is an important location for understanding the dynamics of marriage migration. As can be expected, a lot of young people leave Emirdag and head to Western Europe as marriage migrants. A data set from the marriage register in Emirdag/Turkey – containing data about the wedding, the birthplace of the partners, their nationality, age, the civil status of both partners before the wedding and the place of residence after – gives us more accurate information on this issue. For the period of January 2004–June 2005, we found that the majority (57%) of the couples who marry emigrate to Western Europe (see Table 3). The majority of these migration marriages are contracted within the summer, the period when West European Turks are visiting their region of origin.

Having an idea about the size of Turkish marriage migration towards Flanders, a third data set gives us some indications on the socio-economic position of the people involved in a migration marriage in Belgium. Taken from the Crossroad Bank of Social Security, this data set consists of non-Belgians who have not previously lived in Belgium and who moved to Belgium where their partner (of foreign or Belgian nationality) was resident. This is used as a proxy for 'marriage migration'. The data gathered for 2001, 2001 and 2003 (analyzed with SAS version 9.1 for Windows) consist of 8942, 9579 and 11,333 couples respectively. These data allow us to sketch the socio-economic profile of the immigrants and of their partners in Belgium. Privacy regulations prevented information on the specific nationalities; instead migrants had to be grouped in *nationality clusters*. The largest group of immigrants who entered the country with the purpose of settling with a person resident in Belgium were citizens of the larger Mediterranean region and the Arab world (Heyse, Pauwels, Wets, & Timmerman, 2006). In other words, the majority of people within the 'Mediterranean and the Arab world' cluster come from Morocco or Turkey. One of the relevant observations deriving from this data set is that in Belgium, one in three people who marry someone from the southern or eastern rim of the Mediterranean is unemployed, compared to one in ten in the general population. This data makes us confident to conclude that the socio-economic situation of the Turkish community in Belgium into which Turkish marriage migrants marry is rather problematic.

Table 3
Number and percentage of couples married in 2004–2005 in Emirdag and who have made arrangements to emigrate.

	Number	Percentage
Both partners stay in Turkey	212	43.4
Couple has made official arrangements to emigrate	276	56.6
Total	488	100.0

Source: Emirdag marriage register, own calculations.

Turkish marriage migration remains popular in Belgium. One of the evolving questions then is: why does marrying a partner from a largely unknown country where one's parents or grandparents happen to come from remains so attractive? Likewise, why do so many young people in Emirdag opt for a migration marriage despite all its challenges?

4. Explaining marriage migration

We have mentioned in a previous article (Timmerman, 2008) that several migration theories are helpful, though not completely satisfactory, when explaining the consistently high popularity of migration marriages within the Turkish communities in Western Europe. Let us briefly recapitulate the most important ones.

According to economic migration theories, it is assumed that people leave their country in order to improve their socio-economic situation (McDowell & de Haan, 1997; Wets, 2001; De Haas, 2003). In recent theories (New Economics of Labour Migration, NELM), migration is not considered as an individual decision, but as a decision taken by a bigger unit of people, such as a household. The decision then is based on relative deprivation rather than on absolute deprivation (Stark, 1991; Massey et al., 1993, 1998). There is enough evidence that for *Emirdagli* (residents of Emirdag) the assumed economic benefits of living in Western Europe

are an important factor for imagining migration as a valuable life project. People in Emirdag are convinced that Belgian Turks have an easy life, taking into account their spending behaviour when they are back in Emirdag. However, there is also a lot of evidence that the socio-economic situation of Turkish migrants in Belgium is problematic compared with that of mainstream society (Van Robaeys, Perrin, Levecque, & Dewilde, 2006; Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, & Crul, 2003). On the basis of a study mentioned above (Heyse et al., 2006), we dare to say that Turkish marriage migrants on average marry Belgian residents (mostly Belgian Turks) with a low socio-economic status. On the other hand, in Turkey, the socio-economic situation has been improving dramatically, even if it is still somewhat behind that of Western Europe. In 2007, Turkey's GNI/c ($8020, Atlas method) was higher than that of Bulgaria ($4590) and Romania ($6150) – two EU members – and is continuing to rise (from $3250 in 2005 to $8020 in 2007).[5] Although economic reasons remain relevant for local people in Emirdag as a cause for emigration, the improving economic situation in Turkey as well as the feeble economic condition of the Turkish communities in Belgium must be acknowledged, especially for those who enter on the basis of marriage migration.

Several migration theories focus on the importance of transnational networks for understanding migration processes (Van Heelsum & van Amersfoort, 2007; Nell, 2004; Levitt, DeWind, & Vertovec, 2003; Ostergard-Nielsen, 2003). The existence of transnational Turkish communities is an asset that facilitates migration. It is fascinating to see how daily life in Emirdag is closely interwoven with that of the Turkish communities in Belgium. The majority of families have relatives living in Western Europe with whom they maintain close relations (Timmerman, 1999; Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005). Contemporary migration, including Turkish migration, is more a process of ongoing movement and of interactions between several locations across different countries (Flemmen, 2008; Soysal, 2003). Many Belgian Turks, particularly business people and pensioners, spend considerable time in Emirdag. Transport businesses (especially air and bus companies) play on the specific demands related to migration. This phenomenon of transnational communities enables vibrant relations to be kept between the migrant society and the country of origin (Timmerman, 1999).

In the Turkish case, it is evident that nationalism, both secular and religious, is also an important factor when considering the strong ties between emigration areas and the Turkish diaspora (Kandiyoti, 1991, 1995). Overall, the commitment to Turkey remains high among the Turkish communities in Belgium. Turkey nurtures its relations with its expatriates, favouring all kinds of initiatives that keep ties with the Turkish diaspora alive (Timmerman, 1999, 2000a, 2001). Turkey's ambition to join the EU not only stimulates Turkish identity within Turkey but also among European Turks (Rochtus, 2008). Although the existence of transnational Turkish communities is an asset that facilitates migration, it cannot solely explain the high popularity of marriage migration from Turkey.

5. A culture of migration: binding Emirdag to Flanders

As said before, Emirdag is a small town or *kasaba* in central west Anatolia, situated in the province of Afyon. In Emirdag, everything reminds one of migration. Daily life is closely interwoven with that of the Turkish community in Belgium.[6] Although Emirdag is the Belgian emigration region par excellence, it is not a unique case. Several places in Turkey – mostly small provincial towns – have developed similar kinds of emigration flows to specific European countries or regions (Reniers, 1997).

Labour migration from Emirdag – which soon evolved into chain migration – started in the early sixties. It is said that the first emigrant came from Karacalar, a village renowned for its Alevi shrines, some 10 km from the district capital of Emirdag. The attractive stories shared by these first emigrants soon made emigration a popular phenomenon in the whole Emirdag region (Timmerman, 1999).

Even the material outlook of the Emirdag district is largely influenced by the omnipresence of migration to Europe. Compared to similar provincial towns in the large region, Emirdag and its surrounding villages look prosperous: new and well-kept public buildings, good roads, nice houses and a lot of shops. Commercial activities are especially well connected with Emirdag's 'culture of migration'. Over the last 20 years, for example, Emirdag has witnessed a boom in jewellery shops, which provide the extensive gold gifts for migration marriages, travel agencies, which offer all kinds of transport to

[5] World Bank, World Development Indicators 2008, Internet access database.

[6] In 1989–2007, we conducted several extended field researches in that region. During these stays we lived with an immigrant family who migrated some 30 years ago to Flanders and who spent their yearly holiday in their place of origin. We also stayed with a middle class family that was not yet affected by migration.

European migration destinations and to European embassies in Ankara, services to help the client to fulfil all the administrative requirements for obtaining a visa, shops providing furniture, electric household equipment that is needed for the nice houses built in Emirdag by the European migrants, and construction firms to build these houses.

From their earliest years, young people become familiar with the phenomenon of migration. The majority of real estate in Emirdag belongs to Turks living in Europe, which means that most local tenants are dependent on homeowners who live in Europe. During summer, Emirdag is a very crowded place: thousands of European Turks spend their summer holidays in their region of origin. These '*Avrupali*' – 'Europeans' as they are called by the local population – live in the most luxurious houses in the Emirdag region, drive expensive cars, organize extravagant weddings, in sum, they often behave as 'big spenders'. Migration, more specifically, the lavish lifestyle and conspicuous spending (in Turkish, the word '*gosteric*' is used) of the Turkish migrants who spend their summer holidays in Emirdag, has created an image of Europe as the land of milk and honey, a region with unlimited economic and socio-cultural possibilities.

Yet, there are also people in Emirdag who regret this mass emigration from an economic as well as a social perspective. Local authorities and establishments in particular point to the downside of this 'culture of migration'. In their view, the exodus is detrimental to local investment and prevents young people from committing themselves to developing the region (Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005). Similarly, school directors and teachers complain about the negative effects of the image of the migration project as 'the instrument of becoming rich in a short time without any substantial effort' on the study motivation of youngsters. In the past, studying – for boys as well as for girls – was seen as the means to social mobility. The social cost is also quite apparent: many young people return home divorced and discouraged after a short 'European adventure', and the proportion of broken families among those who managed to hold out slightly longer is high (Timmerman, 1999).

Despite all these critical remarks, a large part of the local population wants to leave for Europe. The rosy picture of Europe is an important element in the existing culture of migration in Emirdag. This image of Western Europe contrasts sharply with the very boring and even depressing picture that young and especially educated youngsters paint of their hometown. In Emirdag, young people are generally dissatisfied with the socio-cultural possibilities and with the rigid social control in this small town. It is a fact that for youngsters who are able to study at the good universities in Turkey's large cities, returning to Emirdag after they have graduated is seldom an option. For those young people who are not able to study in one of the appealing urban centres of Turkey, emigration seems to be a good alternative (Timmerman, 1999).

From the aspirations people have of an eventual migration project, we can discern two main areas: one socio-economic and one socio-cultural. In general, everyone – young and old, men and women – assumes that emigration will improve their socio-economic possibilities. They are rather confident about this, pointing to the spending behaviour the European Turks display when they come to Emirdag. This socio-economic dimension is most pronounced among the least well-off, for whom social and economic security in Emirdag seems out of reach. Also for young men, the aspiration of earning a living with little effort is a major motivation. In combination with these socio-economic ambitions, socio-cultural aspects are also often involved. In the case of the higher skilled, ideological considerations also come into play. The latter perceive their native society as too restrictive, both politically and socially, and they assume that such restrictions are non-existent in the 'Free West'. Among women, we witness a lot of admiration for the western health system. They are fascinated by the high quality health care in Western Europe that seems to be within the reach of ordinary people. Not only young people see emigration as a relevant project, parents also dream of making their children emigrate to Europe. The socio-economic security for their children in combination with easier access to the West for them are the most appealing elements (Timmerman,1999).

In other words, in Emirdag, migration is always an option that is present when people are making plans for the future. Migration has in a sense become 'a habit', a project in which people often engage because 'everyone is emigrating'.

This idea of 'migration as a habit' becomes even more salient when we refer to a previous study which examined attitudes and expectations of aspirant emigrants (Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005). We found that while many are eager to emigrate to Western Europe, few have any concrete idea of the life that awaits them there. The prospective newcomers have no specific conception of Belgium, and even less of Flanders (Timmerman, 2006). They only have an image of 'Europe', which is shaped by migrants who return home for their summer holidays. We found that the negative information coming from migrants who already live in Europe is often ignored or even denied. Prospective immigrants appeared

to be heading for a 'mythical' destination where all their worries would be resolved. Obstacles such as learning a foreign language, non-recognition of academic degrees, irrelevant work experience and a hostile society are, on the whole, taken lightly. In fact, few gave these obstacles any serious consideration at all (Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005).

In Emirdag, it is evident that we can speak of the existence of a 'culture of migration'. The positive image that is created of Western Europe as well as the 'tradition' of migration towards Western Europe have an important appeal to people who are dreaming of improving their socio-economic or socio-cultural position. It is also clear that the substantial emigration from Emirdag has several effects – positive and negative – on daily life in Emirdag.

Although our research focused mainly on Emirdag, we also conducted field research in Sivas, another important emigration region for Belgium. Sivas is a town in central eastern Turkey with 400,000 inhabitants and the capital of the Sivas province. With a severe continental climate, the summers are very warm and dry and the winters very cold (temperatures of −30° are common) with heavy snowfall. The winter can last for five months. Although it is a rather large city, there is little industry. Most people are employed in the service sector. In Sivas, we stayed with a middle-class family which had several relatives living in Belgium. Our findings there were in line with those in Emirdag (Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005).

Turkish communities in Flanders exist because of immigration. The communities from the Emirdag region are best represented in Brussels, Ghent and Berchem (Antwerp); those from Sivas can be found in the city of Antwerp and in small towns in the province of Antwerp. It is important to notice that regional belonging is still a main factor in shaping social networks in which goods and services – including marriages – are exchanged (Timmerman, 1999). Migration as such is still a constitutive element within community life: the eventual immigration of relatives, friends and/or acquaintances is the topic of many conversations. The specific socio-cultural praxis of Turkish migrants within Flanders/Belgium, however, has already been well described (Lesthaeghe, 1997; Timmerman, 1999; Van Craen, Vancluysen, & Ackaert, 2007). Here we simply want to draw attention to the central place migration still occupies within the day to day socio-cultural praxis of these communities. Language, religion, social networks, family relations and ethnic identities are still extensively inspired by their regions of emigration. Not only by means of the memory of the 'authentic' places of origin, but also because of the ongoing migration and very dense communication between the Turkish communities in Flanders/Belgium and the regions of origin.

6. Marriage and the making of a 'culture of migration'

As stated before, family migration – or more specifically, marriage migration – is the most popular emigration regime in Emirdag and has been for several decades. We put forward the hypothesis that unravelling the 'culture of migration' is crucial for understanding the dynamics of marriage migration and that the specific characteristics of 'family' and 'marriage' within the socio-cultural praxis of these Turkish communities – in both origin and destination regions – are vital to explain the success and centrality of marriage migrations within contemporary Turkish communities in Western Europe. As Bailey and Boyle (2004a,b) state, it is necessary to theorize more about the concept of the family in order to understand 'family migration'.

In the local culture of Emirdag, as elsewhere in Turkey, marriage is one of the key social institutions. We know that in recent years half of the marriages contracted in Emirdag were migration marriages (see above). Therefore, we assume that the institution of marriage has been influenced significantly by this phenomenon. It will be demonstrated that migration opportunities have a major impact on changing conceptions of 'family' and 'marriage' not only within the local praxis in Emirdag but also within the Turkish communities in Western Europe. This implies that also within the local 'culture of migration' of Emirdag and the Turkish communities in Western Europe, marriage plays a crucial role. It will equally be made clear that the traditional praxis of 'marriage' within (semi)-rural Turkish communities fits well within contemporary migration aspirations.

For the collection of our data, we relied on a qualitative research methodology based on a focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. A total of eighty four (84) people were interviewed – 64 respondents in Emirdag (43 young single persons and 21 mothers of married children) and 20 respondents in Flanders. The fieldwork in Emirdag was conducted in June 2005. The respondents in Emirdag were either unmarried men/women older than 18 years or mothers whose children had emigrated through marriage. The fieldwork in Flanders was carried out between September 2004 and May 2005. Respondents were selected based on three profiles: (1) Unmarried men and women of Turkish descent and born or raised in Belgium, of 19 years or older, (2) People of Turkish descent born or

raised in Belgium and married to a partner from Turkey, (3) Marriage migrants from Turkey.

6.1. Changing marriage in a 'culture of migration'

Community life in rural and semi-rural areas in Turkey, taking into account the different gender roles and the impact of education, nationalism, religion and modernization, is extensively described in several ethnographies (Stirling, 1965; Delaney, 1991; Timmerman, 1999; Meeker, 1994).

Turkey is a patriarchal society with a clear segregation between the world of men and of women. Local Islam is seen as legitimizing the existing gender roles and family values. Marriage is primarily an alliance between two families. By consequence, the parents are the main actors in the arrangement of the marriage. Traditionally, the bride leaves her family to join the family of her husband. She is incorporated into the family of her husband who now becomes responsible for her and her conduct. The spouses are expected to fulfil the tasks related to their gender role and to assure the continuity of the family. Men must maintain their family and represent them in the public space. Women are in charge of the household and the children. They are responsible for giving birth to a male heir. *Namus* (mostly translated as sexual honour) is a central concept for understanding traditional family values. Women and girls are the object of *namus*, but men are responsible for it. A family with *namus* is a family where the women behave according to the expected social code, especially in reference to sexuality. Girls enter marriage as a virgin, girls and women only interact in a familiar way with men that are excluded as potential sexual partners (i.e. family members); if women enter the 'outside' world they have to behave as modestly as possible, preferably wearing a headscarf, and behaving so as to avoid any doubt concerning their chaste behaviour (see also: Delaney, 1991).

Let us examine in more detail 'marriage' in Emirdag's 'culture of migration' and within the Turkish communities of Flanders.

The impact of migration on marriage in the region of Emirdag and in the Turkish communities in Belgium is considerable. This influence is noticeable at every stage of the arrangement of a marriage, in the modalities of the marriage, and in the changes within traditional wedding rituals and practices.

As stated before, traditionally it is the family and not the future spouses who negotiate the marriage arrangement. During this period of negotiations, it is not required for the persons to be married to meet each other. This conception of marriage which is foremost a negotiated contract between two families fits well within the context of migration where spouses-to-be have far fewer chances of being acquainted with each other than if they lived within the same country, let alone the same community. From a traditional perspective, this is not considered problematic. Parents know best whom their children should marry. However, parents have no direct information about the personality and behaviour of the future son/daughter-in-law when they live in another country. On the basis of our participant observation in Emirdag and within the Turkish communities in Belgium, we witnessed that parents sometimes take advantage of this situation to hide negative aspects about their children from the future family-in-law, such as disease, drug addiction, 'shameful' behaviour, or delinquency.

Traditionally, marriage negotiations and arrangements are settled within a few weeks or months, however there is a consensus in Emirdag that migration marriages are contracted too fast. The young people and mothers interviewed were very negative about the rush in which most migration marriages are arranged. Instead they stressed the importance of getting to know each other. Although this aspect is more associated with a 'romantic' marriage, also within 'traditional' marriage arrangements, young people have the opportunity of getting to know each other. During negotiations and preparations for the marriage, the families together with their children to be married visit each other regularly. On these occasions, the young people can speak to each other, and go shopping or for a walk with a chaperone. During our fieldwork, we noticed that in the case of migration marriages it is not unusual for there to be no more than a few days between the decision to marry and the wedding.

> Respondent: 'The European family comes and requests permission for the wedding. The next day is the engagement. One week later the couple marries.'

That this quote is to be taken literally, Timmerman witnessed during her early fieldwork in Emirdag. The daughter of the family with whom Timmerman stayed was married off within a week. It was only after they were married – the bride was still in Emirdag waiting for her visa and the bridegroom was already back in Belgium – that her parents learned of their son-in-law's rather controversial reputation within the community (Timmerman, 2000b). These migration marriages have to be settled within the short time of the summer holidays of the European Turks. Often, the local people are so enchanted with a marriage request coming from a migrant family that

they take the risk of marrying of their child without really knowing their future son- or daughter-in-law.

The different stages that normally precede the wedding are also treated differently when migration is involved. This can partly be explained by the constraints that Western migration policy imposes on marriage. For example, after getting married it can take up to a year before a groom/bride from Emirdag gets his/her visa to Belgium. To cope with this long waiting period, people often use the occasion of the engagement to get formally married at the municipality. Although the small ceremony at the town hall officially makes them man and wife, the community still considers them to be engaged, with all the restrictions that this implies. They continue to live with their parents (one in Belgium, the other in Turkey) until the day of the wedding ceremony. During our fieldwork, it became clear that the public ritual that made a couple 'man and wife' was not the civic wedding at the municipality, nor the 'Islamic' wedding ceremony conducted by the imam, but the wedding feast – a feast where gifts are given to the couple, where at least some drinks are served, where music and dance play a central role and where representatives of both families are present – followed by the wedding night (Timmerman, 1999, 2000b).

On the basis of our fieldwork, we found that gifts associated with migration marriages also have a different meaning. First of all, it is expected that when a partner from a West European country is involved, the gifts are much more substantial, often several times the value of what is given in the case of local marriages. Traditionally the bride receives gold. The amount of golden jewellery that is given to a bride from a migration marriage has become so large that often the bride is not able to wear all her golden jewellery at the wedding. These gifts, or *mehr*, are intended for the bride herself and have to be separate from the 'bride prize'. In the context of migration marriages, we observed that the outdated practice of a 'bride prize' – a financial gift from the family of the groom to the family of the bride, compensating the loss of a daughter – has been re-introduced (Timmerman, 1999, 2000b).

Marriage migration also involves changes in traditional patterns. Traditionally, it is the bride who leaves her family to join the family of her husband. This principle is called *virilocality*. Most couples only live with the parents of the husband for the first years after marriage, one of the reasons may be financial. It is in line with traditional expectations that a girl who is a marriage migrant will move in with the groom's family in Belgium. In that case, moving in with the parents-in-law can also be seen as supporting and helping the girl as a *newcomer*. This may prevent the newcomer from isolating herself. Table 4 shows the percentage of couples living with the bride or groom's parents (only for couples who married in the period 2000–2003). From the data, we notice that more than half of the couples of which the wife is a marriage migrant live with the parents of the husband (60%).

Table 4
Percentage of couples living with the parents of one of the partners (couples married in 2000–2003) (N=2707).

	Percentage of couples living with the parents of husband or wife
Both partners raised in Belgium	26.8
Wife is a marriage migrant	59.8
Husband is a marriage migrant	15.6

Source: Yalçin et al. (2006).

In the context of a migration marriage between a man from Turkey and a girl from Belgium, this pattern is reversed. The groom will leave his family in Turkey to join his wife in Belgium. Although we see that the majority of these couples establish an independent household, it is evident that the bride's parents will be geographically much closer than the groom's parents who stay behind in Turkey. Therefore, in the case of a young man from Turkey marrying a girl who has been raised in Belgium, we can speak of a real reversal in traditional patterns. Moreover, as many as 16% of these couples in which the husband is a marriage migrant live with the parents of the wife.

Those 16% of couples living with the parents of the bride also present an unusual situation for the Turkish communities in Belgium. This we deduce from the observation that among the couples in which both partners are second generation (or in-between) and live with the parents, in most of the cases (97%) they live with the parents of the husband. This leads us to conclude that the principle of *virilocality* loses most of its importance when migration is at stake, however, among the Turkish generations that are born in Belgium, the principle of *virilocality* becomes re-established.

So it is clear from the above that migration has had a significant impact on the institution of 'marriage'. These changes in wedding rituals and patterns have several consequences that contribute to the construction of a specific 'culture of migration' in both the region of origin and destination. In turn, this makes migration easier and more accessible which contributes to the continuing success of marriage migration.

6.2. Perceptions of marriage migration

Being aware of the deep influence migration has on the institution and experience of marriage within the

Turkish cultures of migration, we found it relevant to investigate – on the basis of qualitative fieldwork in Emirdag and Flanders – respondents' attitudes to migration marriages.

In Emirdag, young people associate the advantages of marriage migration specifically with living in a modern, democratic and prosperous country. Men are particularly motivated to emigrate in order to improve their socio-economic situation. They are quite sure that earning a living will be much easier in Western Europe. While women also share this view, they often stress the broader advantages of living in a democratic, prosperous country with a sound social security system: access to health care, more social rights for women, better financial provisions in case of sickness, unemployment, retirement and also more socio-cultural opportunities. These findings are in line with our previous fieldwork observations on the gendered imaginations of living in Belgium (see above). In other words, for young people in Emirdag, it is actually the factors external to the marital relation as such that are evaluated positively within migration marriages. At the same time, they were rather sceptical about the different attitudes, values and socio-cultural practices which young people in Belgium are supposed to have. They had their doubts as to whether these young Belgian Turks were still suitable marriage partners. In general, they are afraid that Turks in Europe have lost their 'authentic' Turkish culture, implying that they have become too loose, have no respect for the elderly, like to spend money, have bad taste, etc. All this is summed up in the Turkish concept 'kultursuz' (without culture), that is often used to describe European Turks. With the opposite term 'kulturlu' (with culture) people refer to educated and highly civilized people (Timmerman, 1999).

An important reason in favour of marriage migration given by our single respondents in Belgium is that they assume that the quality of a marriage will be better with someone from their homeland than from their own Turkish community in Belgium. They resort to this option since the alternative, marriage with a partner from their own Turkish community in Belgium, is often rejected due to the generally bad reputation of youngsters from the second and following generations. There is a feeling within the Turkish community in Belgium that many Turkish boys have gone astray and that many Turkish girls are too liberated (Timmerman, 1999, 2000a; Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005).[7] Hooghiemstra (2003) came to the same conclusion in her study conducted in the Netherlands. Here, the so-called too-Western and decadent attitude of the local Turkish youth was also cited as a reason for preferring partners from the region of origin.

In the same vein, one can argue that Turkish parents in Belgium are longing for more 'authentic' Turkish partners for their children. They assume that the 'homeland' is a better place for finding such a partner. By importing 'authentic' Turkish young people, they reconnect themselves to their 'lost homeland'. These findings are in line with theories on ethnicity which stress that immigrants go to great lengths in order to reaffirm their ethnic identity in a foreign environment, in which keeping in touch with the original homeland is an important element (Barth, 1969, 1994; Roosens, 1998). Several theories focus on the importance of the construction of an ethnic identity in choosing a marriage partner (Roosens, 1998; Smith, 1992). Young people themselves often share these views with their parents. For them, young people in Turkey are often no more than an image, leaving ample room for them to project all their romantic and idealized visions of how a perfect spouse must be. In our interviews we found out that young Turks in Belgium generally preferred 'traditional' marriage partners. Boys often stress the importance of their future bride being a good, obedient housewife and mother who should be respectful to his parents. For these reasons, some respondents preferred very young, uneducated girls from the countryside in Turkey. But also among Turkish girls in Belgium we found a positive attitude towards marriage candidates from the region of origin, because they are assumed to be responsible husbands who take their role of head of the household seriously.

Other mechanisms can also be relevant for explaining Belgian Turkish parents' preferences for marriage candidates for their children from their region of origin: debts towards relatives who stayed behind in Turkey, assurance of a 'dependent' daughter/son-in-law, occasional financial benefits, such as a high bride prize or dowry, or cheap labour force.

However, in our interviews, Turkish youngsters in Belgium also had their doubts about the success of migration marriages. There was suspicion about the motivation of marriage immigrants from Turkey. They were afraid that they often opted for a marriage solely for economic reasons and with the illusion of becoming very rich quickly. Our respondents in Belgium also indicated that marriage immigrants are confronted with a lot of problems: language barriers, joblessness, a strange environment, and loss of status for the man, or feelings of isolation for the wife. All these elements were seen as obstacles to a harmonious marriage. Once

[7] 'Ethnic identity' is defined as the feeling of belonging and continuity in existence constituted by self-- or other-ascription and which claims common ancestors and cultural tradition (Roosens, 1994).

again, in this discourse, a marriage partner from Turkey remained desirable, even though one could not be certain about his/her sincere love.

> Respondent: '…in a migration marriage you don't know the language. How will you communicate? You don't know each other and you want to marry to lead a comfortable life."

> Respondent: 'there is a big cultural gap. The girls there are free. They want to go to the disco. But the men have problems with that.'

Although it contradicts the traditional patterns regarding marriage, Turkish girls in Belgium see several other advantages in marrying a man from their region of origin. Besides the more 'authentic' character of the groom from Turkey, these advantages are all linked to possibilities for acquiring greater independence within their marriage. In this case, it is most probable that the parents of the bridegroom will remain in Turkey, which considerably diminishes their ability to interfere in the young household and to control their daughter-in-law. This demonstrates that migration marriages are also used as an emancipatory strategy which might enhance the socio-cultural position within the community. These findings stress the gendered nature of migration and the different opportunities men and women seek from it (Riano, 2005).

7. Migration marriage at the intersection between traditions and opportunities arising from globalization

On the basis of our data, we are confident to say that the concept of marriage developed within migration marriages is central to the construction of a specific 'culture of migration' in and between both communities (Emirdag and Flanders). Not only because so many people within both communities are affected by it, but also because it is the way par excellence to enter Western Europe. Marriage is the key factor for turning their 'local culture' into a 'culture of migration'.

From our data, we see that marriage in the context of migration undergoes significant changes and is 'instrumentalized'. However, it seems that these adaptations are rather pragmatic; they disappear when migration is not at stake anymore, for example, the violation of the principle of *virilocality* – grooms moving in with their parents-in-law – remains limited to migration marriages and disappears again within the second generation. Also, the rush in which marriages are contracted seems to be limited to the specific migration context.

But marriage is more than just an instrument for migration. Indeed, classical migration theories as such are not capable of explaining the huge popularity of marriage migration. The most promising explanation for grasping the dynamics that can explain the popularity of migration marriages are found within 'culture of migration' theories, in which social institutions, attitudes, perceptions, and habits play a crucial role. Insight into how a local–transnational socio-cultural praxis is constructed is the key for understanding the ongoing success of marriage migration. Therefore we have to look for explanations that go beyond the ones offered by migration theories alone.

Framing migration marriages within the established socio-cultural traditions of the community provides for a much needed feeling of continuity. This aspect is especially relevant for the Turkish communities within Western Europe. Although the cultural diversity that exists between 'the migrant' and the local people fades in the context of migration, the feeling of ethnic 'difference' remains highly relevant. The emotional engagement with ethnic identity does not diminish with time (Epstein, 1978). In general, strong centripetal tendencies towards cultural homogenization, intense economic integration, and a globalization of consumption and media go hand-in-hand with the development of new forms of 'provincialism' that are often ethnically inspired (Eriksen, 1993). Globalization and localization seem to be two interrelated processes (Friedman, 1990). Migrants have left their familiar background and must become acquainted with a new environment. In an insecure situation, people need more structure and consequently withdraw into a space where they feel safe and confident (Lorkovic, 1993). In such a situation, people seek what they perceive as their 'authentic' identity defined by so-called 'tradition' and 'culture' and legitimated by descent (Akbar, 1995). In other words, they seek an ethnic identity that, according to Frederik Barth, classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background (Barth, 1969). Our data demonstrate that for young people and their families living within the Turkish communities of Flanders, these identifications with the 'authentic' culture of origin play a central role in their decision to marry a person from the region of origin.

Marriage can be seen as an instrument for migration and also for staying connected with the 'pristine' culture of origin. Thirdly, marriage is also used by young women within Turkish communities as well as within the region of origin as an instrument for emancipating themselves from what they perceive as constraining traditions. This also demonstrates that the reasons for migration go beyond mere economic benefits (Riano, 2005). For young Turkish women in Flanders, it is

specifically the opportunity to choose a husband whose parents will stay behind in Turkey that is perceived to bring greater independence. But also within the region of origin, in Emirdag, young women opt for a migration marriage towards Belgium because they dream of a more 'emancipated' lifestyle.

This brings us to conclude that the popularity of marriage migration can only be explained by referring to multiple frames of reference. However, it is clear that the existence of a 'culture of migration' that binds the region of origin with the region of destination and in which 'the family' as an institution capable of building a bridge between traditional praxis and the challenges linked to international migration, is crucial for understanding the enduring popularity of marriage migration.

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